

## **The Grim Vanishing of Barbara Holland by Origamidragons**

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**Summary:**

“This week on BuzzFeed Unsolved, we discuss the strange disappearance of Barbara Holland.”

## The Grim Vanishing of Barbara Holland

**Buzzfeed Unsolved - True Crime S4 • E2**

*The Grim Vanishing of Barbara Holland*

The episode began as it always did- with the sound of shattering glass, a siren screaming in the distance, as a swinging lightbulb illuminated the name of the show: *Buzzfeed Unsolved*.

“This week on BuzzFeed Unsolved we discuss the strange disappearance of Barbara Holland, who vanished out of a small town in Indiana in 1983 after leaving a party,” Ryan began, introducing the episode the same way he always did. “This case is very popular material for theorists online, because there’s evidence there may have been a *government cover-up* involved.”

Shane raised his eyebrows. “What, did she wander into Area 51?”

“Maybe! You’re going to have to wait until the theories to find out.”

“The fact that you didn’t immediately answer *no* is- that is worrying to me.”

Ryan shrugged and turned to grin at the camera without responding.

The screen faded to black, switching to the standard style of constantly-shifting graphics, and Ryan began his narration. The first picture to appear was a grainy yearbook photo of a young woman with short, styled red hair and orange plastic glasses. She was smiling.

“Barbara Holland grew up in Hawkins, a small town in Roane County, Indiana, the only child of Maryanne and Rich Holland. She was a junior at Hawkins High School, the only high school in the area, at the time of her disappearance.”

*so, the town- it’s not tiny, but it’s still like, everybody knows everybody and everybody knows everybody’s business*

*especially in the case of the high schoolers*

*right*

“On November 9th, 1983, Barbara attends a small house party thrown by a classmate, varsity basketball player Steve Harrington. According to the testimony of Nancy Wheeler, a friend of Barbara’s and Steve’s girlfriend at the time, there were five people present: Nancy, Steve, Barbara, and two friends of Steve’s named Tommy and Carol. Of them, Barbara was reportedly the only one who didn’t drink at all, which renders all other testimony from this night suspect. What is known is this: that party was the last time Barbara Holland was seen alive.”

*i mean, at least she, i dunno, had a good time?*

*probably not, actually*

*according to nancy’s testimony she was only there to keep an eye on nancy*

*oh*

*well that’s a bummer*

“At some point late at night, the other four attendees went inside, leaving Barbara out at the pool-”

*wait wait wait*

*pool?*

*who in nowhere indiana in the 80s had a pool?*

*the harringtons, apparently*

“The next morning, Barbara was gone, as was her car. She was absent from school, but it wasn’t until she failed to return home for dinner that night that her mother alerted the authorities. However, the undermanned Hawkins PD was already overextended investigating two other recent major crimes: the famous disappearance of Will Byers and the suspicious death of diner owner Benny Hammond, both of which had happened within the same week as Barbara’s disappearance.”

*bad week*

*no kidding*

*very bad week*

“When Barbara’s car was found just outside the city limits not far from a Greyhound station, it was assumed she’d run away and no further investigation was done into the matter until nearly a year later. Hawkins chief of police Jim Hopper later made a statement about this negligence.”

*‘You gotta understand that Hawkins is the type of town where nothing ever happens. Our police force is me, two deputies and a secretary, and the whole time I’d lived there, that was enough. Then Joyce’s kid goes missing, and the whole goddamn town is out in the woods looking for him. In all the chaos, the Holland girl just slipped under our radar. I know- I mean, I don’t know if there’s anything I could have done for her, but I feel bad about it. Maybe if we’d found her- I don’t know. At least her parents would have gotten some peace sooner than they did.’*

“The Holland parents refused a funeral until Barbara was found, and no new information came to light until a series of tapes were anonymously mailed to the Chicago Sun-Times in the fall of 1984, almost exactly a year after Barbara’s disappearance.”

*oooooh!*

*mysterious*

“The tapes contained a recording of a man later confirmed to be Dr. Sam Owens, head of the Hawkins National Laboratory, a laboratory opened post-WWII operating under government supervision on the outskirts of town.”

*area 51!?*

*i’m telling you, man, you gotta wait and see!*

“The other voice on the recording was never identified.”

The audio switched to a recording, crackly with age but still clearly

discernible as an older man with a condescending note in his voice.

*“Men of science have made abundant mistakes of every kind- George Sarton said that. You guys know who George Sarton is? ...Doesn't really matter. The point is, mistakes have been made, yes.”*

A female voice, sounding indignant, broke in.

*“Mistakes?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“You killed Barbara!”*

*“Abundant mistakes. But! The men involved with those mistakes, the ones responsible for what happened to your brother and- Miss Holland's death, they're gone. They're gone and, for better or for worse, I'm the shmuck they brought in to make things better. But I can't make things better... without your help.”*

The audio ended there, the sound of blank tape playing for a few seconds before it cut out entirely.

*so this, the recording, this is- the central thing that makes this case so fascinating*

*because it's been verified twenty times over as genuine, but there are a lot of theories out there about what the “mistakes” could be referring to*

*along with other details, like who he's talking to, and at one point dr. owens refers to a ‘brother’ who apparently was victim to these mistakes as well*

“Hawkins National Lab was eventually shut down when allegations raised by this tape led to a full, though classified, government investigation into their activities, and the building was demolished in 1990. Barbara Holland's funeral was finally held on December 3rd, 1984, though still without a body to bury. And with that, let's get into the theories.”

“Our first theory, and the most widely accepted one, is the one suggested by the initial Chicago Sun-Times article, that the ‘mistake’

alluded to a poisonous gas leak that was a result of chemical weapons experimentation within the lab. According to the author of the article, a journalist named Mia Trebek, there was a piece of paper contained in the envelope with the tapes that read, and I quote:

*“Trust me when I say that there’s a good reason I can’t give you my name, but what I have to say is important. A year ago, a young woman named Barbara Holland disappeared from Hawkins, Indiana. They said she ran away, but she didn’t. She was killed as a result of toxic fumes that came from Hawkins National Laboratory. These tapes hold the proof- the man speaking is Dr. Sam Owens, head of the lab. They killed people and they shouldn’t be able to get away with it.”*

*“The note was signed someone who wants to see justice done.”*

*this is more rational than i thought you were going to go with the ‘mad science mistakes’ angle*

*“However-”*

*always with the howevers*

*“However, there have been questions raised by this version of events, namely: what happened to Barbara’s body? And why does the note say ‘they killed people,’ plural, when the only death we know of is Barbara’s?”*

*they could have, i mean, they could have cremated her*

*like if she died of some chemical weapons stuff, then maybe they couldn’t risk it getting out*

*yeah, i guess that makes sense*

*“Our second theory is that Barbara’s disappearance was connected with the disappearance of Will Byers, which, as I mentioned earlier, happened only days before she went missing. This timing is very suspicious, because up until Will’s disappearance, Hawkins had *never* had a missing persons case. Suddenly, they had two, within three days of each other, both vanished without a trace.”*

*so this town- quiet town, nothing happens there, never had a*

*disappearance, then suddenly they have two right next to each other*

*it seems, to me, it seems fair to assume they're somehow related*

“Will Byers disappeared late at night on November 6th, 1983. His disappearance created an uproar in the town, and there was a large-scale search launched of the woods where he disappeared that turned up nothing but his abandoned bike until a body was found in the nearby quarry. Everyone who saw the body, including Will’s older brother, positively identified it as him, with the exception of his mother, Joyce Byers, who went into hysterics and vehemently insisted that it wasn’t him.”

“Though local newspapers painted this as a stress breakdown, she was apparently correct, as a week later Will Byers was returned home alive and safe, and the state coroner’s office admitted to misconduct and misidentification of the body. The official story stated that Will was lost in the woods and badly sick, and was thus unable to find his way back to town or otherwise find help. Hawkins is surrounded by woods for at least fifty miles in every direction, so it’s definitely feasible that he wouldn’t be found when lost in the woods even with the search that was mounted. More interesting is his sickness, which was never identified in papers.”

*sick with, uh, mysterious government chemicals, mayhaps?*

*now you’re getting it*

“Our third theory is that Hawkins Lab was not, in fact, studying chemical weapons, but was studying a portal to another world, and that Barbara Holland and possibly Will Byers as well were victims of this experimentation, maybe even falling prey to alien beings.”

*i was wondering if you would find a way to- to wrangle aliens into this*

“There were first- and second-hand reports from all around Hawkins both in November 1984 of mysterious, grey-skinned creatures. A report was submitted by a Lori Carhouse complaining of snarling, inhuman howls in the woods, and a young boy claimed he saw a, quote, ‘grey monster with a face made of teeth’ near his window.”

coyotes, ryan

in indiana?

in- there are coyotes in indiana!

are there?

yes!

...fuck

(wheeze) ahahahaha

goddammit

“Sadly, we may never reach a conclusive answer as to what was being researched in Hawkins National Laboratory. Any surviving evidence was likely destroyed when the building was demolished, leaving the case of what exactly happened to Barbara Holland forever... unsolved.”

### **Author's Note:**

This one was super fun to write, to be honest, especially after the slog that was the Supernatural episode. Upcoming will be *The Strange Odyssey of Perseus Jackson* and *The Mysterious Myth of the Blue Box*, and maybe some more superhero episodes? Also, since there's been a lot of interest in the comments, I'm considering making a 'Postmortem' story with social media-style drabbles about The Reveals. If you want to talk to me about these or future stories, hit me up on Twitter at @hollyrambles or Tumblr at @oriigami!

Some notes:

- Hopper nearly gave the whole game away by saying 'I know there's nothing we could have done,' but he caught himself in time.
- The audio played is from Nancy and Jonathan's



superspy recording session in this scene: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcytWIVEzcE>

- Nancy wrote the note. She kept her and Jonathan's names off of it because she was justifiably scared of reprisal from the lab people- even if they're under better management now, she knows what kind of power they have.

- If the most exciting thing to ever happen in Hopper's time at Hawkins PD is an owl thinking Eleanor Gillespie's hair was a nest, I think it's safe to assume that Will was at least their first missing persons case in several decades, if not the first ever.

- There are indeed coyotes in Indiana.

- The night after this episode airs, just before Ryan is about to go to sleep, he gets a call on his private cell phone. Unlisted number, area code Indiana. He picks it up and there's silence for nearly a full minute until a woman's voice, soft, perhaps in her forties, says 'yes' and then hangs up before he can get a word in. He thinks about it for the rest of the week.

### **Works inspired by this one:**

- [The Perplexing Downfall of the van der Linde Gang](#) by Setaflow